

# Listen

## A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J U L Y 2 0 1 0

V O L 4 : I S S U E 3

### GRATEFUL COMPASSION

The relatively tiny details, circumstances, and situations of life *always* matter. Nothing dwells beyond the scope of our attention. Our orientation toward the specifics of life defines who we are.

Yesterday, deep belly breathing calmed my pulse. Tears threatened to splash the cold, dull gray, speckled linoleum floor. Anguish and astonishment smacked my solar plexus, hard. The man I have loved for eighteen years was attempting to walk a straight line. Instructed to position his feet heel to toe, heel to toe, one foot in front of the next, he could only wobble, flail, stumble. The neurologist reached out her pale hands, positioning her body to offer support to a six foot, five inch, active man now dressed in sky blue hospital shorts and a white tee-shirt, unable to walk across the examination room. My knees buckled.

I landed in a chair, grateful for the support. Snippets of inner knowledge married reality, permeating my consciousness. Overwhelmed by the unfolding implications—an earlier meeting with a neurosurgeon, then hours later, an urgent appointment with a neurologist—I sunk into the lyrics of the U2 song, “Grace.” Playing in me for the twentieth time that day, I breathed, “Grace makes beauty out of ugly things / Grace finds beauty in everything / Grace finds goodness in everything.” In this unexpected circumstance, could I trust this?



Green Violetear—*Colibri thalassinus*

Connection, trust, and compassion were being called forth in me. My response, *I am here*.

None of us are spared from pain and suffering. In my mid-forties, I have already experienced my fair share. That evening, images of a vital, vigorous man darted in me, contrasting with the present, undiagnosed, reality. Anguish in me grew, “This too? I didn’t sign up for this. Why do I have to live everything by experience? It’s really not necessary, thank you very much.” I sobbed—for him, for me—and had a temper tantrum with God. Then, befriending my tumultuous emotions, I found a gentle inner smile as compassion flooded within me. I recalled what Brother David Steindl-Rast, OSB, said, “You cannot be grateful for everything, but you can be grateful in every situation.”

I have a choice to make. We each do, everyday. It is in relation to our attitude or orientation toward

bitterness and resentment, or compassion and gratefulness. Nothing is insignificant. Every action, every word, each thought matters. If we want to become fully human and live passionate, discerning, creative, and contemplative lives that contribute to and engage the world, we have a daily choice to make. Our decision will make all the difference, and carry us in times of joy and suffering. A spiritual director can be a good companion when we wrestle with how to live with compassion and gratefulness.

Will you join me to cultivate compassion for self, others, and the cosmos?

Will you join me to grow kernels of gratefulness—even for that which appears ugly, unwanted, arrives unannounced, and has every right to grow bitterness in the human heart?

Please, simply say *yes*.

—Peggy Bernecker

#### SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Notes: Compassion
- Poetry: The Path
- Global Resources
- Review: *Splash*
- Field Guide: Gratitude—An Unfinished Work?
- Ask Owl

## COMPASSION

**W**hen I was in eighth grade, I suffered through one of the worst possible events—my best friend died by suicide. His death completely devastated me, leaving me hopeless and depressed; there was an empty space in my heart that I could not fill. After all the years of knowing him, and my deep love for him, he was suddenly ripped away from me without warning. However, after about a year, I realized I was able to relate to people who were having problems of their own. In these instances I felt like I could make a difference in people's lives. Perhaps they would not feel stuck and alone in that dark hole of grief where I was caught. Knowing the feeling of not being able to prevent what happened to my friend, and thinking if I had done something differently my friend would have lived, led me to my compassion for others in pain and grief.

This compassion now plays a major role in my desire to go to college and become a veterinarian. All of my life, I have had countless animals ranging from dogs to cats, bunnies to rats, birds to fish, and frogs to hermit crabs. My family has always had about six animals or more at the same time, and regardless of how many there were, each one was special to me in his or her own unique

way. My relationship with these animals strengthened my ability to love and care for others. However it was not always me caring for the animals; many times it was their pure love and affection which I needed at crucial times that comforted me, providing the motivation I needed so desperately to keep moving forward. Yet, this is not the only reason I wish to become a veterinarian.

After having so many pets, and knowing friends who have pets, I know how shaken up people can become when their pet is sick or dies. Often, pets seem like the only ones who do not judge us for who we are and the choices we have made. Pets create the opportunity for us to have a deep, strong, and personal relationship, with a creature who gives us unconditional love. It is in these circumstances—when people are either losing the ones they love most, or think they might lose them—that I can relate and make a difference. By becoming a veterinarian, I am confident that I can help prevent suffering, offer sympathy, and aid people through hard times. After not being able to do this for my best friend, it is important to me that if I can, I will prevent tragedy from occurring in others' lives. I believe that no matter who a person is, or the bad choices they have made, they do not deserve to be hopeless or alone when their pet is not well. Therefore, my desire to aid anyone who is suffering from ending up in the same place that I did a few years ago will be fulfilled through caring for animals, and in a broader sense, I will be helping others in a time of need. 🐾

—Andria Peter, San Clemente, California, USA (High School Class of 2010)

### REFLECT

Has a powerful personal experience shaped the work or service you offer in the world? Is this a topic to explore with your spiritual guide?



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# The Path

When you have followed the map  
which is not a map

and created the path with every  
step

you will traverse the in-ferno,  
meet the dragons and find them  
tame.

You will bathe in  
the pool of the past and empty it.

You will cross the desert and  
fall in love with life teeming there

and you will emerge where  
the luminous world swoons at your  
feet, seeking what only you  
can give.

— Antoinette Voûte Roeder, *Still Breathing* (2010)

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# REVIEW

*Splash! Bathtime and Bedtime Music for Grown-Up Girls*  
by Trish Bruxvoort Colligan  
Strawberry Point, IA: River's Voice Music, 2010  
1 CD, 53 minutes, USD\$16.00

**S**plash is a musical retreat and will bring pleasure to women, mothers, daughters, and everyone who longs for or cultivates self-compassion and love.

If you've been craving respite—with or without a bath—you might delight in Trish Bruxvoort Colligan's playful and deep lyrics, melodies, and provocative vocals. Whimsical and soulful, the listener is invited into rest and reflection. "This is My Time" sets a playful beginning to bath time with sounds of a closing door, match lighting, running water and jaunty lyrics that include, "I've taken care of business and answered all the questions of the day / Now this is my time, my only time / To play with rubber duckie, oh he's so fine / Blowin' bubbles to my toes, it's so sublime." If this sounds trite, it is not. Like a splash, the following songs take the listener on a journey that will challenge, affirm, comfort, heal, and create spaciousness and rest.

A spiritual director, Colligan says that *Splash* comes from her, "passionate desire to awaken in all women greater love and compassion for their amazing selves." Her CD—one of many—"is fueled by her own coveted

bath time rituals and her refusal to allow any fashion magazine to foil her bliss and love of her body. The music of *Splash* will inspire you to celebrate your body, move you to radical self-compassion, and bring you to outrageous enjoyment of your amazing Self."



Comprised of sixteen songs, each speaks a story. Two are particular favorites: in "What If?" the listener is asked, "What would you do if you knew you could not fail? / How free would you be, how deep would you love, dear? / What would you hear if you listened to your beautiful heart? / To your beautiful heart? ... Be gentle, gentle, gentle." The theme song during the Spiritual Directors International educational events in

San Francisco, California, "Blessing to the World" lyrics affirm: "You are the heart – You are the hands / You are the voice of Spirit on Earth / And who you are and all you do / Is a blessing to the world."

*Splash* can be used as an accompaniment to bath time, for prayer, and reflective listening. While leading a women's retreat, I shared two songs as part of reflective talks. We often underestimate how essential it is to cultivate self-compassion and care for ourselves and others. We cannot give what we do not have. *Splash* could be a timely gift for someone close to you, or even yourself. I hope you too may find a soulful homecoming in *Splash*. And now, it's time for a bath! 🛁

## GLOBAL RESOURCES : Supporting Your Spiritual Journey

### Servant Song Ministries

Retreat House & Spirituality Center  
720 East Greene Street  
Waynesburg, PA, USA  
Telephone and fax: 724-852-2133  
www.servantsongministries.org

### Stillpoint House of Prayer

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613-432-2791; www.Stillpoint.ca

### July 23-August 6, 2010

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Monastery of the Risen Christ School for Spiritual Directors: Abbot David Geraets  
Contact Dr. Marie J. DiSciullo-Naples  
207-364-7288; joyologist@gwi.net

### August 24, 2010

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## GRATITUDE—AN UNFINISHED WORK?

**Q**uadratos is the name for what I understand as a universal sequence of practice underneath most spiritual and psychological processes that aid transformation and growth. The sequence is cyclical and ever recurring. The design begins with an awareness of the need to change and grow, which is followed by a time of trial, ordeal, or suffering. Often by surprise, ordeal flowers into renewed joy or union which matures into deeper relating and mature service. A first exposition of this pattern is how I describe the four gospel journey. This is a brief reflection and touchstone from the Christian gospels. How might a similar pattern appear in your tradition?

Along the *journey of quadratos*, four thresholds are encountered. By crossing each, we are invited to the deeper practices of gratitude. The first portal—hearing a summons to change—holds thoughts of betrayal and discontinuity. In the Christian metaphor, this is Matthew's gospel which opens us to a consciousness like Jesus, wherein we too may be able to be kissed by a betrayer at our arrest and say: "Friend, do what you are here to do" (Mt. 26:50).

At the second portal, we are invited to witness feelings of abandonment and perhaps despair. At the moment of arrest, in Mark's gospel, Jesus names the evident scorn yet squarely meets it, saying: "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? ...But let the scriptures be fulfilled" (Mk 14:48-49).

The third portal is high and beautiful. As we travel underneath, we find ourselves in a place where we may suddenly alternate between exultation and unworthiness. At his arrest, portrayed in the Gospel of John, Jesus takes the initiative and offers himself to those who have come for him. Are we able to bow and bend with gratitude to such wide polarity within?

Crossing the final portal in the cycle, we come to a lengthy time of trial and error that might best be described as servant leadership. At the arrest in Luke's gospel, Jesus speaks to the betrayer: "Is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (Lk 22:48). Knowing the sting, Jesus does not move away or resist but embraces an ever-unfinished work. Can we do likewise, in the face of no expedient results?

This description of the journey toward mature gratitude is pictured through the Christian four-gospel journey. Does this sequence match, meet or diverge in your spiritual tradition and its practice?

—Alexander Shaia is a spiritual director, psychologist, retreat and seminar leader, and author of *The Hidden Power of the Gospels: Four Questions, Four Paths, One Journey*.



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# ASK OWL

**Q**uestion: Can a spiritual director help me or my caregivers when I experience a diminishment of my physical abilities due to an unexpected or chronic illness?

**H**oot Hoot: Yes. Please consider meeting with a spiritual director or guide. Everyone who lives with chronic pain, long-term medical conditions that may be stable or progressive, or who is re-orientating life priorities because of physical changes and limitations can benefit from spiritual direction.

Questions can undoubtedly arise such as, Why me? What will I do with this? How can I ask for help—will I be a burden on others? Is God punishing me? Is there a gift or grace in this? Feelings and emotions may abruptly intrude into your everyday activities and even into your dreams when you sleep. A spiritual director will be present to you with compassion, and can help you mine questions of meaning, faith, hope, how to live with suffering and joy, along with ponderings about death and despair. He or she may help you explore spiritual practices and your




prayer life, or meditations to help with pain management.

Author and spiritual director Mary C. Earle, writes, "If you're living with illness, you're entering a school of experience for which our culture offers little wisdom, seeking a way to live with discomforts and within new limitations

that bring you face to face with the fact of your own mortality and prompt you to ask deeper questions about meaning and life, about death and eternity." In times like these a spiritual guide can be a life-giving companion.

To locate a spiritual director go to [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org) to the online *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*, or telephone your local hospital and ask for the spiritual care department, or contact a retreat center, theology school, or spiritual direction program and ask if they have a list of spiritual directors. Or, ask an ordained minister, rabbi, or vowed religious for names of spiritual directors they recommend.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail [Listen@sdiworld.org](mailto:Listen@sdiworld.org).



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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio



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